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Universal Society of the Friends of the People.

THE humiliating state of mankind in general, and the contemptible light in which they have been, and are almost universally held by their political rulers, are facts which we are happy to find gradually becoming subjects of enquiry. To account rationally for the degradation of human nature, with a view to its reformation, is an object surely deserving the attention of every thinking individual;—it is a pursuit in which generous citizens must feel themselves interested. Little indeed does that man deserve to enjoy who can be indifferent to the pressing exigencies of his fellow-creatures—who can contemplate the numerous victims at the shrine of ambition, and in a cool and deliberate manner give a tacit sanction to vices of the most atrocious kind.

It is notorious that the governments of Europe (France excepted) act as though they considered mankind formed for the benefit of governments, instead of governments for the good of the people. Agreeable to this idea their now famous Champion, a vile apostate, has had the audacity to substitute for the bulk of human kind, the epithet of *Swinish multitude*: and according to the present order of things, it must be admitted that Mr. B. chose a very proper term—but we dare anticipate a few revolving suns will revert his elegant appellation, and render his memory as contemptible as his political creed.

Society requires a government—explicit laws—and easy regulations.—Formed on those principles individuals would feel their honour and happiness connected with their obedience—they would not only sanction, but readily support a structure, the main object of which pointed to general and individual good. Under such a system no necessity would occur for those pests of society, Informers, Excisemen, Tide-waiters, Searchers, &c. &c. Few indeed would be the taxes necessary to support a government formed by the people, and mankind would be greatly relieved from the numerous train of tax-gatherers who now grossly prey upon the vitals of industry.

We cannot help lamenting the general depravity which that of governments have introduced.—Man, naturally formed for social intercourse, is loaded with oppression; necessity obliges him oftentimes to renounce pleasures congenial with his nature; and too often he is driven to fatal excesses.

Britons!—Fellow Citizens!—Let us reflect but a moment, and we shall certainly unite in the common cause—we are equally loaded with taxes—though very unequally represented in the legislature—we deny the right of a few individuals to the exclusive privilege of governing so many millions of good citizens—we deny the equity of civil distinctions arising from religious principles—no! contemptible position!—Imperfect indeed must that system be, that cannot be supported but by a barrier of superstition and military threats. Adopt an equal representation and equitable laws will ensue—the door of corruption will be shut—nor will avarice, that bane of empires, be able to cope with the genuine principles of justice.

It is an insult to the feelings of Englishmen to suppose they can sanction the political enormities of the present day—generous in their nature, they shudder at every species of devastation and rapine—they cannot, nor will they sanction

sanction a formidable mass of corruption.—They are not so criminally blind as to smile with complacency on those whose highest distinction is plunder—nor are they so totally ignorant as to estimate any man's time equal to the liberty of robbing them of so much of their property as to be enabled to riot for a time in all the luxuries and dissipations of life, and afterwards retire loaded with riches and pensions. But let us turn indignantly from this contemptible picture, and hail the speedy approach of general happiness—hail the moment when the ethereal blaze of friendship will spread from pole to pole—when religious animosities will cease, and when society will forget all distinctions but those of wisdom and virtue. Hail the happy days when the wretchedness of poverty will be ameliorated, and the pride of riches vanish before the pleasures of extending happiness to surrounding objects. Oh! hail! hail Britons! hail! The happy period of universal knowledge advances with slow but steady pace—man begins more generally to feel himself the friend of his own species—reason is reassuming her empire, and kindling a flame of benevolence never more to be extinguished.

Citizens SOLDIERS and SAILORS of all Nations, Empires, Kingdoms and States, you likewise are interested in this great subject—we feel for you—you are united to civil society by the bonds of nature—you are constituted from among us—you are our friends, our brethren—you have relations of every description with us—fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, nay, even wives and children—all join with us in ardently panting for your preservation, and deploring your hardships—all shrinking with horror at the diabolical practice of coolly bartering your precious lives for the most mercenary purposes. Ah! brave, but ill-fated men—dare to think, and even dare to avow, that nothing but the good of society shall influence your arms—dare to be the friends of oppressed virtue, and the terror of overbearing vice—your own situation, together with that of society, demands those exertions. Convince the wretched despots, that though you are unfortunately born in the cold embraces of poverty, you have minds too great to be bought or sold, like beasts of burden—that fearless of the dangers of war, you prefer dying the death of freemen to living the life of slaves. Nature shudders at the idea of men, who at the nod of tyrants risk their reputation in the detestable service of impressing seamen, tearing them from the endearing embraces of their families, and plunging them into an armed tender, where they are too often victims to disease and an untimely end. Poverty is not the criterion of depravity. We invite you, therefore, to participate in the glorious cause of freedom—and peaceably to unite in investigating the sources of all our grievances. For this purpose the following plan is submitted:

I. As all men, by nature and sound policy, have equal right to citizenship, persons of every description are invited to join this society.

II. The discussion of political subjects will chiefly engage the attention of the society. If any persons should not conduct themselves peaceably, it shall be in the power of the majority to expel them.

III. It being the intention of the society to disseminate a spirit of enquiry among all ranks, which in printing, &c. will be attended with some expence, each member will be required to contribute 2d. per week.

N. B. Every member may contribute as much more as his circumstances will permit.

IV. The society to consist of an unlimited number of divisions, each of which not to exceed thirty members; but to divide, if they please, as soon as they shall have twenty members. Every division to choose their own chairman and secretary once a quarter.

V. That

V. That a general committee be formed, for the purpose of conducting the business of the society, to be constituted from the whole body, in the following manner:—As soon as five divisions be formed, each to elect a deputy, who, with the chairman for the time being, shall be deputed to the committee, and shall from time to time report the business of the said committee to their respective divisions. The committee will choose a treasurer.

VI. The society to meet once a week, on Thursday evening. The chair to be taken at eight o'clock.

VII. If a speedy and effectual Reform should, upon investigation, appear necessary, it will be the chief object of this society to discuss the plan of a National Convention, by which all parties may be fairly and equally represented. Every member will then be requested to bring forward his ideas, that from the whole an eligible plan may be adopted.

VIII. That every member shall be at liberty to introduce a friend or two, as visitors.

IX. The society will correspond with similar ones in these realms, and endeavour regularly to ascertain the number of good citizens who have associated for the purpose of bettering the state of mankind.—The society will also correspond with similar societies in other kingdoms, for the purpose of political information.

X. To convince the world of the inflexible integrity of this society, every member who is able, will be required to step forward in cases of riot and depredation, to support *personally* the *rights* and *properties* of *any* individual in the state, who at any time may be so unfortunate as to be the object of popular resentment.

XI. The society, conscious of the justness of their cause, is determined likewise to support any individual member of their body, who may be *unjustly* prosecuted on account of political principles.

N. B. Aware of the invaluable effects of speedy associations, the Friends of Freedom request all good citizens in town and country to form immediate societies for the laudable purposes of political enquiry. It behoves them to associate without delay in their respective neighbourhoods—they may be assured that larger societies will ever be ready to incorporate them as a branch of themselves. If the use of public-houses be denied, it is hoped there is virtue enough among private individuals to induce them to open their own houses for the noble purpose. It is by numbers only that the cause of freedom is likely to prosper; and as it is the determination of the societies to claim redress of grievances in a peaceable manner, it ought to be the first object of every friend speedily to unite. Supported, as they are, by the combined principles of reason, justice and moderation, they may defy their most formidable opponents. Englishmen, remember you will leave a stigma on the present æra, if you suffer yourselves quietly to be dragooned out of the only solace that remains, that of social intercourse and rational enquiry. How will the page of history be stained—how will the feelings of posterity be wounded—how will great and good men in future ages be palled with the relation of the *timidity* of their *ancestors* who so *dastardly* cringed to the *temerity* of *inflexible depravity*, and transmitted to them the *inheritance of ignorance* and the *horrors of despotism*! Oh citizens, you know not the blessings which unanimity will give you—'tis *virtue*, *disinterested virtue*, or *the most unqualified vice* that *must* triumph in the laurels of victory—Heavens grant it may be the former! Feel then as men—feel as brethren, and as the children of one family—breathe the pious effusions of universal love and benevolence—consider the life of every individual as a sacred pledge

forget

—forget the despicable idea of living alone to self, and learn to shew a fraternal regard for every rational inhabitant of the globe.

DECLARATION.

Anticipating the ill-natured epithets of *Republicans* and *Lewellers*, we hereby openly declare, that we shall be perfectly satisfied with the decision of an equal representation—that when we speak of *liberty* and *equality*, we by no means intend *civil rights* to be mistaken for *civil distinctions*. We are persuaded that society ever was and will be composed of people in different circumstances—therefore, in speaking of the rights of citizens, we beg leave it may be understood, that we include an inviolable respect for private and public property. See Rule X. XI. We manfully avow ourselves not so much the enemies of men, as of measures.

CONCLUSION.

All men in the scale of nature are equal—and have equal rights to the privileges of citizenship as soon as they attain the age of twenty-one years—insane persons only excepted.—Neither wealth nor mental qualifications are any arguments in favour of partial civil distinctions; we find them both exist in the vilest characters; therefore, those only are the best citizens who display the greatest integrity of heart. Let us, however, seriously and impartially discuss the merits of the present constitution—If it is a good one (and we are told it is) let us unite in preserving so glorious a fabric—it will stand the test of enquiry—and the most formidable attempts to shake it will dwindle into insignificance. If it can be demonstrated, that no money is wantonly lavished away—that no unnecessary places are created—that no pensions but those of absolute necessity are granted—that our sage legislators only hold their offices for the good of their fellow men—that they never sumptuously eat and drink, and enrich themselves on the vitals of the community—that justice is impartially distributed at the most possible trivial expence—that the efforts of the pious leaders of Christianity justly entitle them to share the hard earnings of their lay-brethren—that the most desperate poverty and wretchedness does not exist—that all men are happy, and pay their quota of taxation cheerfully—that the soldiers have a comfortable provision, and no plea left for pillaging—that if they are permitted to go to work by way of relaxation, their pay is continued to them, and not embezzled by their officers—In short, that no improvement can possibly be made for the benefit of the public—When these things are fairly and unequivocally ascertained, we will retire with admiration.

